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ABSTRACT

The mother/daughter relationship is probably one of the most enduring affectional bonds. Addressing the assumption that family members differ in their orientation to and dependence on other generations by virtue of their unique roles, three generations of women, 254 mother and daughter pairs, were studied for role convergence and the effect of role status on interdependence. The roles examined were marital status for the students, parenthood and work status for their mothers, and marriage/widowhood for the grandmothers. The components of interdependence in the mother/daughter relationship were aid (proximal and distal), contact (measured by frequency of visiting and telephoning), and attaching (dependence on a specific person for emotional support). Analyses of data showed that middle aged women related similarly to their mothers and daughters regardless of role status, and widows were no more dependent on children than married elderly women. Role status was significant for the youngest generation in that married daughters exhibited greater independence from their mothers than did single daughters. (WAS)

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Two Generations of Mothers and Daughters: Role Status and Interdependence

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TWO GENERATIONS OF MOTHERS AND DAUGHTERS: ROLE STATUS AND INTERDEPENDENCE

Although probably the most enduring affectional bond, the mother-daughter relationship in adulthood has not been studied extensively. Extant work has focused primarily on geographic proximity, frequency of contact, and the exchange of goods and services (Hill et al., 1970; Sussman & Burchinal, 1962). Rarely have the affectional aspects of the relationship been studied.

Empirical characterization of contact and assistance has relied heavily on the report of only one generation or on aggregate differences by generation. One generation can provide only a limited view of the relationship (Thompson & Walker, 1982) and aggregate analysis can, at best, offer only a modal pattern of contact and aid (Larson, 1974). Rarely have both partners served as informants and their relationship and the pattern within generational pairs been the focus of study.

Underlying much of the intergenerational research is an assumption that family members differ in their orientation to and dependence on other generations by virtue of their unique roles (Bengtson & Kuypers, 1971; Hess & Waring, 1978; Troll, Bengtson, & McFarland, 1979). This study addresses this assumption directly, uses both partners of the dyad as informants, and includes intimacy as a criterion variable; thus, it differs from many studies on intergenerational ties.

BACKGROUND

An examination of the intergenerational relationship literature suggests that important role statuses are tied to the developmental position of the individual. Troll, Bengtson, and McFarland (1979) suggest that variance in affection in intergenerational relationships is

tied to the ontogenetic development of the younger generation of a family. Others suggest the needs and resources of each generation are tied more closely to the role transitions of adulthood (Bengston & Kuypers, 1971; Hess & Waring, 1978). From this perspective, aspects of aid and affection between adult women and their mothers have been linked to several role changes.

Fischer (1981) found that mothers with married daughters had different perceptions of the symbolic aspects of their relationship than did mothers with unmarried daughters; e.g., they perceived their daughters as more selfless. Bengston and Black (1973) reported that young married children were closer to their parents than single children. Using a slightly older sample, Baruch and Barnett (Note 1) report that daughters perceived their relationship with their mothers as more rewarding if they themselves were neither mothers nor wives. Adams (1968a), however, speculated that the marriage of female children results in a greater understanding of and more perceived commonality with the mother.

Although mid-life women have not been the focus of much research regarding the connection between role status and interdependence, parenting status and work status are likely determinants of patterns of interdependence. Progress in launching children and return to the work force are important changes in the life of a middle aged woman (Bernard, 1975; Neugarten, 1968; Rubin, 1979).

For older women, widowhood is viewed as the critical adult role affecting intergenerational ties (Bernard, 1975; Fischer, 1981; Hess & Waring, 1978; Neugarten, 1968; Troll, 1971). More frequent interaction among children and their widowed mtohers has been reported (Adams, 1968b) as has a greater amount of aid received by widows than by still-married mothers (Adams, 1968b; Lee & Ellithorpe, 1982; Lopata, 1979.

This study examines the connection of these role statuses to interdependence in mother-daughter relationships in adulthood. Two sets of mothers and daughters are used so that we include pairs from different role statuses. We examine role convergence (Adams, 1968a; Fischer, 1981: Haqestad, 1981; Neugarten, 1968) in regard to the marital role but not in all of its combinations. Since all of the middle gneration are married, we cannot look at the influence of their unmarried status, but we can examine the married/single status of the youngest generation and the widowed/married status of the oldest generation. From this, we can discover if sharing marital role status with the middle generation influences interaction in the two sets of relationships.

We examine the joint effects of various role combinations between partners in both sets of relationships: In younger pairs, we study the combination of daughter's marital status and mother's parental status as well as daughter's marital status and mother's work status. In older pairs, we examine the combination of daughter's parent status and mother's marital status as well as daughter's work status and mother's marital status. The question addressed is how one partner's role status interacts with the other partner's role status in regard to dimensions of interdependence. These role combinations are examined in addition to the influence of individual status.

We conceptualize interdependence in a multidimensional way; i.e., as aid, contact, and attachment. We distinguish between proximal aid--services that require physical proximity--and distal aid--economic interdependence (Fischer, 1981). Frequency of visiting and telephoning both are used as measures of contact and attachment is the affectional measure. Attachment refers to dependence on a specific person for emotional support and includes the dislike and discomfort of being spearated from the other person.

METHODS

Sample. The data for this paper were collected in 1981 and are part of a larger study of three generations of adult women. Female students enrolled primarily at the University of Oklahoma were recruited through classes, fliers, and newspaper ads. Two hundred eighty students expressed interest and met the criteria of (a) a living mother and (b) a living maternal grandmother. These students received a packet containing a letter of instruction for soliciting the help of the mother and grandmother, and three packets of materials, one for each of the three participants in each generational set. Of the 280 students contacted, 166 completed self-administered questionnaires as did 166 mothers and 148 grandmothers. Only 15 women in the middle generation were unmarried. This distribution did not allow us to examine the influence of marital status in the middle generation on interdependence. We controlled for the effect of marital status, therefore, by omitting the 15 women from further analysis. The sample for this paper includes those 135 pairs of students and mothers in the youngest and middle generations and 119 pairs of daughters and mothers in the middle and oldest generations for whom data on both partners are available.

Most of the students are single (77%), aged 20-25 (68%), and are in their junior or senior years of college (52%). The majority (69%) have an annual average income of less than $5000 but half are unemployed.

Most of the middle generation are aged 40-49 (63%) and live in middle-class households. Thirty-eight percent have some college experience, 24% have graduated from college, and the remaining 38% are spread out on both ends of the educational scale. Thirty percent of the women live in households with incomes of less than $30,000 per year; another 26% have family incomes between $30,000 and $40,000 per year; and the remaining 44% have family incomes higher than $40,000 per year.

About 40% of the oldest generation are 60-69 years old, another 40% are between 70-79, while the remaining 20% are in their 50s or 80s. About 40% of the older women have some high school or less, another 30% have finished high school, and the remaining 30% have some experience in higher education. Forty-four percent have family incomes less than $10,000 per year, 38% report between $10,000 and $25,000 per year, and 18% exceed $25,000.

Measurement. A series of questions assessed how often each generation gave assistance to the other generation across several goods and services: help during illness, advice, shopping, gifts, money, and childcare. Only the middle generation was the recipient of childcare and this was a rare occurrence (sporadically throughout the year or less) in 90 percent of the cases. Because of its rare occurrence in this sample, childcare was not included in calculations of aid.

Two types of aid were specified--aid which requires physical proximity and aid which can be provided at a distance (Fischer, 1981). Frequencies of giving help during illness, advice, and shopping were summed and averaged to give a "proximal" aid score for each partner in the relationship.[1] Similarly, frequencies of giving gifts and money were summed and averaged to give a "distal" aid score for each partner.

Frequency of contact was assessed within each generational pair for visiting and telephoning. Eight response choices ranging from almost never to more than once a day were offered for each. There was high agreement between partners on frequency of contact with correlations of partner's estimates within relationsips ranged from .7 to .8. The correlation between frequency of visiting and frequency of telephoning hovered around .8 within relationships. A combined score was computed for the pair for visiting and telephoning, therefore, by summing the two contact frequencies

and averaging the scores of the two partners. A higher score reflects more frequent contact.

The questionnaire included 50 items reflecting various aspects of intimacy (Walker, 1979). Each respondent reported her perception of the two generational relationships in which she was involved. A factor analysis of the intimacy items produced five dimensions. The factor patterns and intercorrelations were similar across relationship targets. Only one of the factors is used in this paper--attachment. The following items marked the attachment dimension:

1. We're dependent on each other.
2. We anticipate each other's moods.
3. We nurture each other.
4. I feel like I want to support her.
5. She is closer to me than others are.
6. We're emotionally dependent on each other.
7. When we anticipate being apart, our relationship intensifies.
8. We anticipate each other's needs.
9. Our best times are with each other.

Reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) for the attachment scale range from .86 to .91 across relationship reports. Items were summed and averaged to create individual scores. The possible range on the scale is 1 to 7, and a higher score reflects greater attachment.

The roles considered in this paper are marital status for the students, parenthood and work statuses for their mothers, and marriage/widowhood for the grandmothers. Among the student generation, 82% are single and 18% are married. Because the sample was obtained through college women in the youngest generation, all of the middle-age women have engaged in some aspect of

"launching." For the purposes of this study, parenting status of the mothers is divided into four groups: preadolescent youngest child (20%); adolescent youngest child (30%); all children at least 18 years old although at least one is still considered dependent (37%); and all children at least 18 and considered independent (13%). Work status of the middle generation distinguishes among full-time (52%), part-time (15%), and unemployed (33%).

Data Analysis. For each generational pair, there are seven criterion variables reflecting interdependence: mother's and daughter's perceptions of attachment, frequency of contact, proximal aid to mother, distal aid to mother, proximal aid to daughter, and distal aid to daughter. For the younger generational pairs, predictor role variables are daughter's marital status and mother's parent and work statuses. For the older generational pairs, predictor variables are, again, the middle generation's parent and work statuses, and older mother's marital status. Two dummy variables were created to represent work status (with unemployment as the reference category) and were treated as a set in the regression analysis. Interaction terms were created to reflect combinations of individual roles (work by parent) and to reflect dyadic combinations of roles (marital by work and marital by parent). A series of hierarchical multiple regressions were perfomed regressing each criterion variable on role statuses; interaction terms were entered in the final step as suggested by Cohen & Cohen (1975).

RESULTS

The results of the regressions demonstrate that interdependence remarkably is unrelated to the role status of either mother or daughter or to combinations of roles between partners. In the younger generational pairs, only daughter's marital status emerges as connected with interdependence. Parent and work statuses of middle-aged mothers and interaction terms--work by parent,

marital by work, and marital by parent--are unrelated to any dimension of interdependence. Since the simple correlations of role statuses with criterion variables were unchanged virtually in the context of other predictors, we present only these correlations in Table 1.

Table 1 about here

The results are striking regarding the influence of a young woman's marital status on interdependence: the relationships of married daughters with their mothers are characterized by less interdependence than relationships of single daughters and their mothers. When the daughter is married, mothers and daughters exchange less aid, especially aid that requires proximity, than when the daughter is single. Mothers and daughters have less contact when the daughter is married rather than single, and both partners tend to perceive less attachment in the relationship.

In the older generational pairs, none of the regressions has noteworthy or significant R^2s. Parent and work statuses of middle-aged daughters and widowhood of older mothers are unrelated to any dimension of interdependence. Interaction terms reflecting role combinations are also unrelated to attachment, contact, or aid. The simple correlations presented in Table 2 are consistently negligible.

Table 2 about here

DISCUSSION

There is a conspicuous absence of effects of role status on interdependence, especially in terms of combinations of role statuses. Thus, these

data provide no evidence for the influence of a combination of roles within or between partners, although not all possible combinations have been considered.

Although launching and work status for the middle generation offered much promise in terms of a focus away from family roles, the data fail to support such an influence. Middle age women relate to their daughters and mothers similarly, regardless of the degree of dependence of their children and their own employment.

These data provide no evidence that widows are vulnerable to dependence on their children or grandchildren; i.e., they are no more dependent than married elderly women. This finding is in striking contrast to reports of other research (Adams, 1968b), although Lopata (1979) measured change in amount of goods and services received retrospectively and Lee and Ellithorpe (1982) reported only small differences between widowed and still-married mothers. Perhaps a change in amount of aid received occurs only at the transition to widowhood. Our data do not allow us to comment on this transition.

The only role status that showed significant influence on mother-daughter interaction was the marital status of the youngest generation. The results clearly show that marriage means more independence form mother in terms of aid, contact, and attachment. Perhaps Hess and Waring (1978) were correct in their assertion that the primary adult loyalty is to the conjugal bond. Both mothers and daughters in our study demonstrate that interaction is different when the daughter becomes married. So, although there is role convergence in terms of marital status, this convergence must be concomitant with normative pressures away from filial bonds. Other researchers suggest greater ties to mother after marriage of the daughter (Bengtson & Black, 1973; Fischer, 1981), yet Baruch and Barnett (Note 1)

found stronger ties to be important for the psychological well-being of the daughter when she lacks other roles and relationships. Our data do not allow inferences regarding psychological well-being, but they do show stronger ties among the unmarried women and their mothers as compared with married women and their mothers.

Future research, obviously, must focus on the meaning of role status with regard to commitments, needs, and resources. If these were dimensionalized separately, we would be able to separate out the effects of each. Apparently examining the role without compartmentalizing its separate influences washes out any effects that might be present.

Reference Note

1. Baruch, G., & Barnett, R. C. Adult daughter's relationships with their mothers: The era of good feelings (Working Paper #74). Wellesley, MA.: Center for Research on Women, 1981.

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FOOTNOTES

[1]Although one can give advice from a wide range of geographical distances, it was included in the category of proximal aid because frequency of giving advice was related negatively to geographical distance. Frequency of giving advice also was more highly correlated with shopping and providing help during illness than with giving money or gifts.

Table 1. Correlations between Role Status and Interdependence for Younger Generational Pairs of Mothers and Daughters

	Role Status			
	Daughter's Marital	Mother's Parent	Mother's Full-time Work	Mother's Part-time Work
Dimensions of Interdependence:				
Attachment--daughter's report	-.11	-.06	-.04	.01
Attachment--mother's report	-.16*	-.03	-.04	.06
Visiting and telephoning	-.21**	-.07	-.01	.00
Proximal aid to mother	-.36**	-.09	-.10	.04
Distal aid to mother	-.08	-.03	-.07	.01
Proximal aid to daughter	-.47**	-.12	-.09	.05
Distal aid to daughter	-.21**	-.02	.07	-.05

NOTE: Role status coded so that a higher score reflects daughter has married, mother has progressed further in launching, and mother's work status is full-time or part-time.

* $p<.05$
** $p<.01$